

# Department of Human Services

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## Articles in Today's Clips Monday, July 23, 2007

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## Report faults foster licensing

State computers share blame in boy's death

July 22, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Glitches in Michigan's child welfare computer system and deficiencies in licensing rules for agencies that supervise foster children are at least partially to blame for the beating death of a 2-year-old in Detroit, a state report obtained by the Free Press shows.

The 10-page report from the Office of Children's Ombudsman contains 13 recommendations for reform, most involving licensing regulations.

The report, obtained Friday, stems from the investigation by the Ombudsman's Office into the Aug. 16 death of Isaac Lethbridge in a foster home licensed through the Lula Belle Stewart Center of Detroit.

Isaac's death resulted in the suspension of Lula Belle's license to place foster children and criminal charges against his former foster mother, Charlesie Adams-Rogers, who was convicted last month of involuntary manslaughter and child abuse. She is serving 5 1/2 to 15 years in prison.

But the boy's death now could lead to strengthening state oversight of 239 agencies that are licensed through the state Department of Human Services' Office of Children and Adult Licensing (OCAL) to place children in foster care.

Some 19,000 children are in the foster system in Michigan. Many live with relatives, but most live in about 7,000 licensed homes.

Although the DHS already has made some of the changes proposed by Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin, those involving licensing changes must go through a lengthy process that includes public hearings before they could be implemented, officials said.

Meanwhile, the Free Press confirmed Friday that Lula Belle has reached a settlement with the state over the suspension of its child-placing license in August 2006. The agency agreed to drop its appeal of the suspension and of the DHS' written intention to revoke the license, but it will be allowed to reapply in 2011.

Jim Gale, director of OCAL, said that, if Lula Belle's appeal had gone to trial in the state administrative court -- as it had been scheduled to do beginning July 16 -- it would have required testimony from state social workers and work by the state Attorney General's Office that would have taken them away from other duties.

Even if the DHS had won the case, Gale said, the maximum time Lula Belle would have been barred from applying for a new child-placing license was only two years under state rules.

"We think it keeps the kids safe, but it also protects some of our resources," Gale said.

Lula Belle lawyer Janice Hildebrand confirmed the agreement and said the agency is working to get back on the right track.

"Lula Belle Stewart has a new administration and board of directors who are committed to providing needed quality services throughout the Detroit community and aspire to return to the level of excellence that Lula Belle has historically been known for," Hildebrand said.

Lula Belle has other government contracts to provide social services to needy people in the city, including a child day care center licensed by the DHS.

The agency's new executive director, William Sabado, was unavailable Friday, a woman who answered the agency's phone said.

"The event that precipitated this matter, the loss of a child, should remind everyone that we work in an imperfect system and that we need to address the issues that led to this tragedy," Hildebrand said.

The ombudsman's report says Lula Belle declined to respond to its investigator's questions because the agency and several of its former social workers are being sued by Isaac's parents, Matt and Jennifer Lethbridge of Canton.

The report covers only issues related to Isaac's death. A Free Press investigation published in three parts in January disclosed a history of licensing violations at Lula Belle going back several years.

One weakness in the child welfare system the ombudsman identified is the inability of Child Protective Services investigators to quickly check reports of previous problems in specific foster homes in the DHS computer system.

The DHS vowed to fix the glitches in its computer system by the end of this year.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313- 223-4544 or [jkresnak@freepress.com](mailto:jkresnak@freepress.com).

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# **Report cites rules, computer glitches in 2-year-old's death**

*Associated Press - July 22, 2007 10:24 AM ET*

LANSING, Mich. (AP) - A state report blames glitches in Michigan's child welfare computer system and deficiencies in licensing rules for agencies that supervise foster children in the death of a 2-year-old foster child.

Details of the 10-page report from the Office of Children's Ombudsman were published today by the Detroit Free Press. It contains 13 recommendations for reform, most involving licensing regulations.

The office investigated the August 16th death of Isaac Lethbridge in a foster home.

The state Department of Human Services' already has made some of the changes proposed by Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin. But those involving licensing changes would need public hearings and other review.

Charlsie Adams-Rogers was sentenced earlier this month in Isaac's death. Defense attorneys had said Adams-Rogers' mentally disturbed and violent daughter, then 12, fatally beat Isaac. The girl wasn't charged.

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## Glitches in Foster Care System May Have Led to Death of Child

July 23, 2007 07:13 AM EDT

A state report blames the death of a foster child on glitches in a child welfare computer system. The Office of Children's Ombudsman issued the report, which also says deficiencies in licensing rules put Isaac Lethbridge at risk. The child was beaten to death last year while living in a Detroit area foster home. The report contains 13 recommendations for reform, most involving licensing regulations.



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## Boy pulled from neighbor's pool dies

Thursday, July 12, 2007

**By Theresa D. McClellan**

**The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS -- A 3-year-old boy died early today, two days after he was pulled from a neighbor's pool and one day after authorities removed him and two siblings from their mother's custody.

The court's terms allowed Melissa Matthews to be with her youngest son, Jeremiah, who was on life support at DeVos Children's Hospital until this morning. Court officials also are allowing "liberal" visitation between Matthews, 26, and her surviving children, ages 5 and 7.

Matthews wept Wednesday upon hearing the decision. Authorities say her children have a history of being unsupervised.

"This is a tragic case, but she has had 18 months of intensive supervision and nothing works, then this happens," said Ginny Mikita, who is the court-appointed lawyer for the children.

Neighbors said Matthews' children were wandering the streets for about three hours Tuesday before they ventured into the gated yard at 49 Straight Ave. NW and entered the pool. The homeowner, Victor Cruz, who has a second-shift job, was awakened around 11:30 a.m. by Melissa Matthews' screams in his backyard.

The children had run home for help after Jeremiah went into the pool. Matthews said she jumped into the pool after her son. She tried to revive him and was assisted by neighbors until authorities arrived.

Police believe the boy was under water for at least 10 minutes.

Matthews said she thought her children were playing with friends in the neighborhood and had no idea they were in the pool.

According to records, child welfare authorities had contact with Matthews in each of the past three years, including an incident in which one of her younger children was found trying to cross a busy street alone in 2005.

Child Protective Services officials told the magistrate they exhausted all their efforts to make Matthews more responsible, and nothing worked. Following an investigation by CPS, she would follow their guidelines for a time, then return to her old habits, court records show.

Magistrate John Kmetz noted Wednesday that Matthews has gone through several programs.

"You jump through every hoop ever given to you, you do it well, but when there is no hoop, you don't follow through with what you've learned," Kmetz said.

The surviving children will live with a foster family as the courts determine the best placement option.

"This is a sad and unfortunate ordeal and a hard lesson learned," said Matthews' aunt, Donna Marlette. "Supervision is needed to be a good parent. Now, she has to have time to grieve."

**Send e-mail to the author: [tmcclellan@grpress.com](mailto:tmcclellan@grpress.com)**

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## Boy's death launches looks at CPS

Updated: July 20, 2007 06:03 PM EDT

**GRAND RAPIDS** - State Rep. Michael Sak will call for a House investigation into the drowning death of a three-year-old.

Jeremiah Matthews died after he and his young siblings snuck into a neighbor's pool. 24 Hour News 8 uncovered records and reports showing past investigations by the state's Child Protective Services of Melissa Matthews, Jeremiah's mother, for neglect.

The state Department of Human Services is looking into the way CPS handled her case. Sak told 24 Hour News 8 he will call for an investigation after the initial one wraps up.

**Previous stories from 24 Hour News 8:**

[3-year-old dies from pool accident](#)

[Mother of near-drowning child: 'I blame myself'](#)

[Boy found in bottom of pool](#)



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## Girl dies hours after abuse charges

Wednesday, July 11, 2007

**By Nate Reens**

**The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS -- After learning his baby sister, Lucretia Teunis, died of head injuries, 5-year-old Seth Stauffer promised his mother he would make things better.

"He keeps saying he's going to get older and bring her back to me," Jennifer Teunis said Tuesday. "He says that she's with God, but I don't know that he knows what's going on, that she's not coming back.

"I don't know how I'm going to tell him so that he understands," said Teunis, 24.

Her 8-month-old daughter died Tuesday night.

Earlier, police charged Teunis' live-in boyfriend, Jeffery Mata, 21, with first-degree child abuse.

Grand Rapids police Detective Paul Warwick this morning said Mata made a statement to police acknowledging the child's injuries would have happened while she was in Mata's care Monday morning.

He declined to identify the nature of the injuries or how they were caused.

Mata was caring for the infant and two other children, ages 3 and 5, Warwick said. He told police he called his girlfriend, the mother of the infant, to report the child was sick. She told him to call 911 and he did, then waited for the ambulance to arrive, Warwick said.

The mother said Mata initially told her he did nothing to cause the girl's injuries, and he thought she was having an asthma attack.

"He treated them like they were his own. It's mind-blowing to me because she knows him as her father, calls him 'Da-Da,'" she said. "There had to be so much force to do this. I can't even imagine."

Lucretia had a feisty personality, Teunis said. The infant had a keen sense of when her mother needed a smile and a kiss.

The girl's organs were to be donated today, Teunis said.

State police records show Mata has no serious criminal history. He pleaded guilty in May to driving without a license and was fined \$90.

**Send e-mail to the author: [nreens@grpress.com](mailto:nreens@grpress.com)**

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## Man guilty of murder for killing boy, 3, with punch

Associated Press - July 20, 2007 2:34 PM ET

### Corrected Version

ST. JOSEPH, Mich. (AP) - A jury in Saint Joseph has convicted a man of second-degree murder in the beating death of his girlfriend's 3-year-old child.

Twenty-6-year-old Jonathon Roseberry also was found guilty of child abuse, and he faces up to life in prison at sentencing.

Roseberry hit Glenn Ferguson in the stomach in January at a house in Berrien County Benton Township, and the boy died two days later at a hospital in Kalamazoo.

Information from: Kim Strode/WSJM-AM, <http://www.wsjm.com>

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# THE DAILY Reporter

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## Bethel Twp. couple faces child abuse charges

[Print Page](#)

By Don Reid-Staff Writer

COLDWATER — A Bethel Township couple faces charges of third degree child abuse after a 12-year-old was reportedly spanked with a board on March 20.

Roland Smith, 55, and Juanita McGarry turned themselves in and were released on a recognizance bond. Both pleaded no guilty to the two-year, high-court misdemeanor.

The girl's father took her to the Emergency Room at Community Health Center of Branch County for treatment. Michigan State Police were called to investigate the bruises across her bottom.

The probable cause affidavit said Smith admitted hitting the girl once with a board. The mother said she used it twice because the 12-year-old girl was not doing her chores.

A preliminary examination has been scheduled for Sept. 6.

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## Police Crack Abandoned Child Case Using DNA

POSTED: 6:34 pm EDT July 20, 2007

UPDATED: 7:17 pm EDT July 20, 2007

**DETROIT --** Police have cracked an abandoned baby case from 2003 using a national DNA database, after the mother of the baby was arrested on unrelated drug charges in another state.

Four years later, investigators had enough evidence to arraign 40-year-old Marion Basset on Friday under suspicion of child abandonment.

In 2003 police said Basset left a newborn baby girl addicted to crack-cocaine on a stranger's doorstep and took off.

"It just stunned me," said Alexis Williams, who found the baby wrapped in a blanket and a sweatshirt on her doorstep in 2003. "I didn't know how to react or nothing."

Detroit police have been searching for the baby's mother since then.

Basset was picked up in Alabama on narcotics charges and her DNA was put into a national database.

"Officers with the child abuse unit obtained some DNA from the child and they entered it into our DNA tracking system," said Deputy Chief Marshall Lyons. "Several years later we discovered a person who was incarcerated at the Alabama state prison had submitted some DNA and it matched."

After the DNA was matched, police discovered Basset was back in Detroit and arrested her.

Police said Basset confessed to abandoning her daughter in 2003.

Health officials said the girl has suffered multiple health problems and has since been placed in a home.

Basset is being held on a \$100,000 bond.

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### RELATED TO STORY



**Video: Mother Charged In Abandoned Child Case**



## Detroit woman charged with child abandonment

July 20, 2007

Marion Bassett was arraigned Friday on charges of child abandonment and child abuse, according to a Detroit Police Department news release. Police believe she left her infant daughter was on the front porch of a home in the 4800 block of Balfour in 2003. She turned 40 on Friday.

Bassett was incarcerated in Alabama for an unrelated case and her DNA was placed into a national database. In pursuing the abandonment case, authorities placed the child's DNA into that same database and on July 12, the Detroit Police Department was alerted of a match. Officers learned she was in the city Thursday and they arrested her.

She is being held on \$100,000 bond, according to WDIV-TV Local 4. The station also reported that Bassett confessed to the crime.

*Bowdeya Tweh*

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July 20, 2007

## Science helps find mom of baby left on doorstep

**Norman Sinclair / The Detroit News**

**DETROIT** -- A woman accused of abandoning her newborn baby on a doorstep almost four years ago is scheduled to be arraigned tonight in 36th District Court.

Police said Marion Bassett was arrested Thursday thanks to scientific investigation. Bassett is charged with one count of child abandonment, a 10-year felony and one count of child abuse, a four-year felony.

Police said Bassett was 36 years old and the mother of one other child when she left her newborn on the steps of a home on Balfour on the city's east side at 4 a.m. Dec. 16, 2003.

At that time, the resident of that home told police she heard a tapping on her window, looked out and saw nothing and went back to sleep.

Several hours later the resident was taking her kids to school when she looked on the steps of the home and noticed a box with a baby inside.

Detroit Police Sgt. Angela Gordon, the commanding officer of the Child Abuse Unit, said for several years police found no trace of the mother.

Gordon said that in 2002 Bassett was imprisoned at the Alabama State Prison. Upon her release, she was required to give a DNA sample that was placed in a national database. Earlier this summer, Detroit Police used a federal grant to have 367 unresolved DNA samples submitted for national testing.

James Tate, spokesman for Detroit Police, said of the 367 samples, 170 were viable. Of that group, 71 had positive matches including Bassett's, which matched the DNA of the child abandoned four years ago.

Gordon said that information on Bassett was turned over to the Violent Crimes Task Force, which tracked the woman to her mother's home on Chatsworth on Thursday.

Gordon said she has only six officers on the child abuse unit and each one of them helped out on this case.

"The message I want to get out is that if you commit a crime with a child we don't stop investigating," Gordon said. "It may take a while, as it did in this case, but we will get you."

Gordon said Bassett was in prison on a felony bad check charge in Alabama. At the time of her arrest Thursday, she was wanted on two outstanding warrants. One was possession of narcotics paraphernalia and failure to appear in court on another case.

Gordon said that Bassett, after abandoning the children, had four more children. Two of them are in foster care.

*You can reach Norman Sinclair at (313) 222-2034 or nsinclair @detnews.com.*

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## Child service officials seek Saginaw mother

Sunday, July 22, 2007

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

TOLEDO -- Authorities believe a Saginaw mother is evading child services authorities after she fled a Toledo, Ohio, hospital Friday evening.

A spokeswoman with Toledo's Lucas County Children Services said officials with the organization were set to interview the mother when they discovered she left Toledo Hospital with her day-old son.

Officials with Saginaw County's child services organization contacted their Lucas County peers to request they interview the mother after officials in Saginaw failed to secure a court order related to the mother and child, spokeswoman Julie Malkin said.

"They asked us as a courtesy and we agreed," Malkin said.

She said Saginaw County's branch had taken away one or more children from the mother in the past. Malkin didn't know any more details about the case and said she couldn't release the mother's name.

"We are very concerned about the baby's welfare," Malkin said.

A Toledo publication reported that police were monitoring routes to Michigan with instructions to look for a pickup with a Michigan license plate and a lawnmower with a tarp in back.

A man was driving the vehicle, The Toledo Blade reported. v

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## Parents take their baby, flee hospital, face charges

Monday, July 23, 2007

**LANIA COLEMAN**

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

TOLEDO -- A Saginaw couple could face child endangerment charges because they left a hospital here with their 1-day-old son, apparently to avoid an interview with a protective services agency.

Lucas County prosecutors have authorized warrants for Fredrick E. and Margaret R.. Badenhop, whose departure from Toledo Hospital touched off an interstate manhunt about 7:15 p.m. Friday, said Toledo Police Sgt. William Wauford.

Police in Saginaw tracked the couple and the infant, Noah, to their home about 7 p.m. Saturday, Wauford said.

"The Badenhoops had an open case with (Saginaw County Child Protective Services) and knew they were in jeopardy of losing custody of the newborn," Wauford said.

Child Protective Services officials have taken custody of the baby, he said.

It was unclear today where the baby is.

Randy R. Barst, director of the Saginaw County Department of Human Resources, said he cannot comment on whether his agency is involved.

"The department, first and foremost, is to make sure children are safe and protected," he said. "We attempt to do that with children placed in their own home. If not, we go to court (for safe placement)."

Margaret Badenhop delivered Noah on Thursday, but mother and son left the hospital with Fredrick Badenhop, 35, apparently to avoid an interview with Lucas County Children Services officials, police said.

At the time the family left the hospital, the parents had legal custody of the child, he said.

Child Protective Services in Saginaw County asked their Lucas County peers, Children Services, to interview the Badenhoops, said Julie Malkin, Children Services spokeswoman.

The agency in Saginaw County had tried but failed to obtain a court order related to the mother and child, she said.

"They asked us (to question the couple), and as a courtesy we agreed," Malkin said.

She said Child Protective Services had taken at least one other child from Margaret Badenhop.

Malkin had no additional details about the case. v

LaNia Coleman covers law enforcement for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9690.

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## Infant sent to foster care

Thursday, July 12, 2007

GRAND RAPIDS -- A magistrate on Wednesday ordered an infant into foster care after the child's mother allegedly allowed a 15-year-old daughter to drive. The 15-year-old, Claudia Trevino, was killed Monday in a crash in Ottawa County that injured other siblings. The victim was not licensed, police said. The case involving the infant -- who was born July 3 and was not in the car -- will be transferred to Muskegon County, where an emergency hearing is set today regarding older children of Graciella Trevino, court officials said.

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## Bank wall crasher under house arrest

Thursday, July 12, 2007

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

An Albee Township mother of two must stay at home for having her unrestrained infant son on her lap when she intentionally rammed her truck into a bank's brick wall.

Carrie L. Zervan, 23, who lives at 12670 East, will remain under house arrest for a year and serve five years of probation for safebreaking and second-degree child abuse. She committed the crimes Feb. 4, 2006, at the Montrose State Bank branch at 10811 Albee (M-13).

Saginaw County Circuit Judge William A. Crane found Zervan guilty after a bench trial.

Crane ordered Zervan to pay \$12,852 in restitution and \$120 in fees and fines.

Police said Zervan had her unrestrained 7-month-old son on her lap when she rammed her Dodge pickup into the branch. Zervan and her son suffered minor injuries, police said. Her other child was not in the truck, they said. v

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## Missing girl found, Amber Alert canceled

Police Blotter

**NORTH BRANCH TOWNSHIP**

**THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION**

Friday, July 20, 2007

**By Matt Bach and Bryn Mickle**

**Journal Staff Writer**

NORTH BRANCH - An Amber Alert issued Thursday for a 2-year-old girl believed to be in extreme danger was canceled after the girl was turned over to state police by her mother.

Police and family members searched for Salena Ann Weston for several hours Thursday afternoon after the state Department of Human Services workers went to her home in North Branch and could not find her. DHS had a court order from a Lapeer County judge to take temporary custody of the girl, according to the state police's Lapeer post.

An Amber Alert was issued around 4 p.m. and the girl was brought by her mother to the state police post at 7:50 p.m., said Sgt. Joe VanderMeulen.

"She came to our post, she picked up the call box phone and said, 'I understand you're looking for me,'" VanderMeulen said.

The girl was handed over to DHS, which then gave the youth to her father's parents, who had been granted temporary custody. Her father is currently serving in Iraq, police said.

Police are working with the Lapeer County prosecutor's office to determine if any charges will be filed. The case remains under investigation, VanderMeulen said this morning.

Part of the issue was the that mother's boyfriend has a criminal history of harming children and sexual assault, and the girl was not to be with the mother's boyfriend, police said.

- Matt Bach and Bryn Mickle

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Published July 22, 2007

From Towne Courier

## **Golf outing to benefit children**

The Caring About Kids golf outing is Aug. 3. The four-person scramble will be at Wheatfield Valley Golf Course (1600 Linn Rd.) with a shotgun start at 12:30 p.m. For \$80 each golfer gets 18 holes of golf with cart, BBQ lunch, buffet dinner and chances to win prizes and gifts. Allegiant Air has donated round-trip airfare for two to Orlando for one of the raffle prizes. Proceeds will benefit Ingham County foster care youth. To register, call (517) 485-2646 or visit the Web site at [www.caringaboutkidsinc.org](http://www.caringaboutkidsinc.org) .



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## Foster Parent Training Course to be held

CHARLOTTE — Eaton County Dept. of Human Services is pleased to announce that a training course for new foster parents will be held for Eaton County residents this summer in Charlotte (DHS building, 1050 Independence Blvd), Tuesday & Thursday evenings, through Aug. 9, from 6-9 p.m. This series of eight classes is open to any adult or adult couple wishing to learn more about being a foster family. The classes are required by DHS to foster children. Sign up for classes or request an information packet by leaving a message at (517) 543-5844 or (517) 543-5934.

### Golf event to benefit McDonald House

LANSING — The Accident Fund Insurance Company of America will be the ninth annual golf classic to benefit The Ronald McDonald House of Mid-Michigan. The event will be on Monday, Aug. 6 at Hawk Hollow Golf Course. The registration fee of \$800 includes golf, a continental breakfast, lunch, awards dinner, team photo, a silent auction, a polo shirt and goodie bag. For additional information, to register or request a registration form, please call (517) 485-9303.

### Charlotte Pet Show to be held care facility

CHARLOTTE — The 2007 Charlotte Pet Show will be held on the ground of the Eaton County Medical Care Facility, 530 W. Beech St. in Charlotte on Aug. 18 from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. The entry fee is \$10 per pet, one entry per family. Entry forms are available at the desk near the main entrance of the facility or in the Activities Department office. For more information, call Beth West at (517) 543-2940, ext. 124.

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## Governors to ask for health care increase

July 23, 2007

BY KATHLEEN GRAY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

TRAVERSE CITY -- Facing what they said is a crisis, the nation's governors agreed Sunday to send an urgent plea to President George W. Bush to continue a program that sends federal money to states to support health care for children.

The federal program has sent \$25 billion a year to the states to cover care for children whose parents have no health insurance but earn too much money to qualify for Medicaid.

Michigan received \$120 million last year for the program, which helped 30,000 children.

The Democrat-controlled Congress wants to increase funding to about \$60 billion and pay for it with a 61-cent per pack tax on cigarettes. Bush supports a \$5-billion increase and said he'll veto a much larger increase. The governors said that an increase of at least \$14 billion -- to keep up with inflation -- is needed.

The program expires Sept. 30.

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## Governors step up push for children's health funding

7/22/2007, 7:58 p.m. ET

By **JOHN FLESHER**  
The Associated Press

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — The nation's governors stepped up pressure on the Bush administration Sunday to boost federal spending on a health insurance program serving low-income children.

During its annual meeting, the National Governors Association reaffirmed support for expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program while declining to endorse a specific funding amount.

"The governors have been very firm that SCHIP is their No. 1 health care priority at the federal level," said Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, wrapping up her term as chairwoman of the organization.

The program subsidizes insurance for children and some adults with incomes too high for Medicaid but not high enough to afford private insurance.

The Senate Finance Committee last week approved a five-year, \$35 billion expansion, to be paid for with a 61-cents-per-pack increase in the federal cigarette tax.

Supporters said that would allow 6.6 million people to maintain their existing health coverage while adding 3.2 million uninsured children to the program.

House Democrats are expected to seek a \$50 billion increase, financed by cutting payments to insurers that administer managed care plans under the Medicare program for seniors.

President Bush has threatened a veto, saying the program should grow only by \$5 billion. It will expire Sept. 30 if Congress and the White House can't agree on terms for continuing it.

In letters to Bush and congressional leaders, the governors urged them to settle the matter without a series of stopgap extensions. They praised the Senate bill's preference for giving state governments flexibility in running the program instead of strict mandates.

"Gridlock, no answer, is the worst answer," New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine said during a panel discussion at the governors meeting. Continuing the program without adequate federal funding would be "disastrous" for state budgets, he said.

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07/23/2007

## Committee emphasizes S-CHIP

*Childrens' program is set to expire in Sept.*

BY EMMY PARSONS

[eparsons@record-eagle.com](mailto:eparsons@record-eagle.com)

**For more photos  
from the National  
Governor's  
Association  
Meeting, see our  
photo gallery »**



Record-Eagle/Jan-Michael Stump  
**Michigan Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski speaks at a meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee at the annual meeting of the National Governors Association at the Grand Traverse Resort & Spa in Acme.**

ACME — Governors stressed the importance of Congress acting quickly to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program that is set to expire Sept. 30.

"I think it is critical from a governor's perspective that reauthorization happen quickly," said Matt Salo, director of the NGA's Health and Human Services Committee. "The program expires at the end of September. There is a full month in August when Congress is out of session, and with the presidential veto threat hanging over all the major discussions, it could pose an extreme problem to get this reauthorized in a timely manner."

Led by chairman Gov. Jon Corzine of New Jersey, governors on the Health and Human Services Committee met Sunday to discuss the S-CHIP, which provides health care to children who do not qualify for Medicaid but whose families do not earn enough to afford private health care.

Current proposals to reauthorize the program span from an additional \$5 billion advocated by President George W. Bush to an additional \$50 billion advocated by the U.S. House of Representatives. Current funding stands at \$5 billion and provides coverage to around six million children.

Governors did not back a specific proposal, but emphasized that Congress must make a decision before the program expires.

"Gridlock, no answer, is the worst answer," Corzine said.

Governors also addressed the issue of health information technology and allowing electronic prescriptions, standardizing electronic health histories and improving the ability of physicians to have electronic appointments with patients.

"The goal here is to provide quality health care for the people of our country and to make it affordable and to make it safe," said Vermont Gov. James Douglas, vice chair of the Health and Human Services committee.

"I believe (in) what health IT is designed to do, what it can contribute to the American people, and if we have

the information at the fingertips of our practitioners and our hospitals it's going to be more accurate, it's going to be safer and more cost-effective care."

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July 23, 2007

## Democrats Press House to Expand Health Care Bill

By [ROBERT PEAR](#)

WASHINGTON, July 22 — After a rare bipartisan agreement in the Senate to expand insurance coverage for low-income children, House Democrats have drafted an even broader plan that also calls for major changes in Medicare and promises to intensify the battle with the White House over health care.

President Bush has threatened to veto what he sees as a huge expansion of the children's health care program, which he describes as a step "down the path to government-run health care for every American." The House measure calls for changes that the administration will probably find even more distasteful, including cuts in Medicare payments to private health plans.

Like the bill approved last week 17 to 4 in the Senate Finance Committee, the House bill would increase tobacco taxes to help finance expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program.

House Democrats hope to portray the issue as a fight pitting the interests of children and older Americans against tobacco and insurance companies. The White House says the Democratic proposals would distort the original intent of the children's program, cause a big increase in federal spending and adversely affect older Americans who are happy with the extra benefits they receive from private health plans.

By packaging Medicare with the children's health program, Democrats say, they have built a strong intergenerational coalition that could help them overcome a presidential veto. The House bill has already drawn support from two powerful groups, [AARP](#) and the [American Medical Association](#), in part because it would prevent cuts in Medicare payments to doctors. But the House bill is likely to meet fierce resistance from some [Republicans](#) because it is more costly than the Senate bill and could undermine private Medicare health plans, which have been championed by Republicans for a decade.

The proposal comes as health care has risen to the top of the domestic agenda. Presidential candidates from both parties are searching for ways to overhaul the health care system, control costs and address the needs of the uninsured.

Lawmakers say they see an urgent need for action. The Children's Health Insurance Program is set to expire on Sept. 30, and Medicare payments to doctors will be cut by 10 percent on Jan. 1 if Congress does not act.

On Sunday, House Democrats said that they would unveil their bill in the next few days and that they expected to push it through the House next week, before Congress leaves town for a monthlong summer recess.

Under the bipartisan Senate plan, the federal government would increase spending on children's coverage by \$35 billion over the next five years, for a total of \$60 billion. House Democrats want to increase spending by \$50 billion, which is 10 times the increase sought by Mr. Bush.

Representative [Charles B. Rangel](#), the New York Democrat who is chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, said the House

bill would “reverse the Republican drive to privatize Medicare,” by reducing payments to private health plans that care for 8 million of the 43 million Medicare beneficiaries.

Proponents of the private plans, offered by companies like UnitedHealth and Humana, say they provide more benefits than traditional Medicare.

But the nonpartisan [Congressional Budget Office](#) said the government paid the private plans, on average, 12 percent more than it would have cost to care for the same people in traditional Medicare. Moreover, it said, payments to the fastest-growing type of plan, known as private fee-for-service plans, are 19 percent higher than the cost of traditional Medicare.

The House bill would gradually reduce these payments so that Medicare would pay the same amount, regardless of whether a beneficiary was in a private plan or in traditional Medicare.

AARP, which represents nearly 39 million older Americans, and the American Medical Association said they would begin running television advertisements on Monday to secure passage of the House bill.

The bill, known as the Children’s Health and Medicare Protection Act, would block impending cuts in Medicare payments to doctors, giving them a modest increase in fees in each of the next two years while Congress tries to devise a new payment policy.

Under existing law, according to the latest annual report of the Medicare trustees, Medicare payments to doctors would be cut by 10 percent in 2008 and about 5 percent in each of the next eight years, for a cumulative reduction of more than 40 percent by 2016.

In the Senate Finance Committee, 6 Republicans joined 11 Democrats in defying Mr. Bush’s veto threat. The House bill was developed entirely by Democrats, who hope to win support from some moderate Republicans.

Cigarette makers are fighting the proposed increase in tobacco taxes, while insurers are lobbying against cuts in their Medicare payments.

“Cuts of this size would mean the end of a lifeline for many seniors,” said Karen M. Ignagni, president of America’s Health Insurance Plans, a trade association.

Michael J. Tuffin, executive vice president of the association, described the insurance industry’s “grass-roots strategy” to oppose the cuts in a recent e-mail message to member companies. Mr. Tuffin said “field operatives will organize small gatherings of seniors across the country” and rent minivans to take them to the district offices of House members, to “speak out against the cuts.”

Senator Jon Kyl, Republican of Arizona, said last week that the cost of the Democratic proposals was unsustainable. “We are making promises we can’t keep,” Mr. Kyl said.

In addition to expanding health care for children and curbing payments to private insurers, the House bill includes these provisions, as described in a written summary of the legislation and interviews with lawmakers:

¶ It would be easier for low-income Medicare beneficiaries to get additional help. Congress would simplify application procedures

and relax the strict limits on assets, which now disqualify many retirees with modest savings.

¶The secretary of health and human services would be allowed to expand Medicare coverage of preventive services like certain disease-detection screenings. To encourage use of these benefits, Congress would eliminate most co-payments and other charges.

¶Medicare would pay primary care doctors, including internists and family physicians, to coordinate the care of some people in traditional Medicare. Researchers say such coordination improves care and saves money, especially for people with chronic diseases who may be seeing six or eight doctors.

¶State insurance commissioners would be given more power to regulate marketing by agents and brokers selling private health plans to Medicare beneficiaries. State officials and consumer advocates say that some people have been tricked into enrolling in such plans by agents who use deceptive sales tactics.

¶Congress would abolish a provision of the 2003 Medicare law that requires the president to propose changes in Medicare to limit its reliance on general revenue. Democrats fear that this requirement will be used to justify cuts in benefits or in payments to doctors or other health care providers.

In addition, the House bill would prohibit private Medicare plans from charging higher co-payments than traditional Medicare.

On Sunday, the [National Governors Association](#), at its annual meeting, in Traverse City, Mich., declared that “urgent action is needed” to bolster the children’s health program. “Defaulting to a series of temporary extensions of the program would be untenable for states and the millions of children who rely on the program,” the governors said in letters to President Bush and Congress.

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## Free dental clinic brings smiles

Monday, July 23, 2007

By Ted Roelofs

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Jiden Cann was one of the lucky ones.

The Grand Rapids youth sailed through his dental visit this week at Mel Trotter Ministries without a cavity.

"It's OK," said Cann, 15, flashing a shy smile after his second visit to the clinic.

Volunteer hygienist JoAnne Hodder sees other children with different stories to tell.

"We are seeing kids with eight and 10 cavities," Hodder said. "They come back two, three and four times. I have seen a 4-year-old with an abscess and cavities.

"This is so important, because young children that have problems with their primary teeth are going to have problems with their adult teeth."

Although the free dental clinic fills an obvious void, advocates say far too many low-income families and children go without the dental care they need. And with research linking oral health to heart attack and stroke, the stakes are higher than a sore tooth.

John VanderKolk, dental director of Health Intervention Services in Grand Rapids, called untreated dental needs Michigan's No. 1 health issue.

"We are getting more and more research that says there are ties between dental health and general health," said VanderKolk, who sold his private dental practice in 1998 to help found the nonprofit medical and dental clinic.

VanderKolk noted periodontal disease has been linked to coronary artery disease and stroke, as well as delivery of low birth-weight babies.

But VanderKolk said Michigan continues to do a patchwork job in reaching those who need treatment.

"I don't think we are even close," said VanderKolk, who estimated that area hospital emergency rooms treat 10 or 15 dental emergencies a day.

In 2006, Michigan's Department of Community Health reported the number of dentists participating in Medicaid had fallen from 1,578 in 2000 to 961. Many dentists who participate in the program limit the number of Medicaid patients they take. Its reimbursement rates deter other dentists, VanderKolk said.

Michigan restored non-emergency care dental care in 2005 for approximately 600,000 adults on Medicaid, two years after the benefit was cut to trim about \$10 million out of Michigan's \$7 billion Medicaid budget.

Hygienist Hodder has worked at the summer clinic the past four years, a project backed by the Grand Rapids Dental Hygienists Society and West Michigan Dental Foundation,

Hodder realizes the clinic could treat dozens more families if it had the resources. It accepted 50 families and children for this summer's clinic, a total limited by the 15 volunteer dentists and 20 hygienists it

recruited.

Grand Rapids resident Sarah Stamul still is paying off a dental bill from four years ago for her son, Joseph, 7.

So she was relieved to get Joseph into the clinic at Mel Trotter, where an X-ray found seven cavities.

"I had no idea how bad it was until I took him in there. It was kind of a shock when I found out.

"If Mel Trotter wasn't there, I would be in debt to a lot of people, including a dentist."

**Send e-mail to the author: [troelofs@grpress.com](mailto:troelofs@grpress.com)**

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Article published Jul 23, 2007

## Teen held after break-in attempt

A 16-year-old boy was in custody Sunday after a Hartland Township resident allegedly caught him trying to break into a home in the 1200 block of Courtney Court.

The homeowner told the Living-ston County Sheriff's Department that the boy had ripped off a screen and was trying to get access to a bathroom window in the house at about 6:30 a.m. Sunday.

The homeowner yelled after seeing the boy's arm in the window, and the boy ran off in the area of the Hartland Glen Golf Course, the Sheriff's Department said.

Deputies and a tracking dog located the teen at a Hartland Township home less than two miles from the Courtney Court address, the Sheriff's Department said. He was taken to the Washtenaw County Youth Center pending a hearing today in Livingston County Juvenile Court.

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## Foster worker arraigned

Sunday, July 22, 2007

ALLEGAN COUNTY -- An adult foster care worker was arraigned in Allegan County 57th District Court Friday on charges of third and fourth degree criminal sexual conduct and vulnerable adult charge. Edgar Cortes Jimenez, 22, of Benton Harbor, was arrested Thursday following an investigation of an assault on a client of the Cornerstone Adult Foster Care Residence in Allegan County. He remains in the Allegan County Jail pending a \$25,000 bond.

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## Cop charged with abuse

Sunday, July 22, 2007

MUSKEGON -- A Muskegon Heights police officer has been arraigned on a domestic violence charge stemming from a July 4 incident that occurred while he was on duty. He has been suspended from the force. Marvin Gene Petty, 41, of Roosevelt Park, entered an innocent plea to the misdemeanor and posted a \$3,000 personal recognizance bond. Michigan State Police were asked to investigate by Muskegon Heights Police Chief Clif Johnson. A condition of Petty's bond is that he have no contact with the alleged victim or her residence in Muskegon. "The allegation is that there was a verbal argument between the two and during the argument the victim was struck in the leg," said Brett Gardner, Muskegon County chief assistant prosecutor. The victim said she was struck in the leg by a collapsible baton, Gardner said.

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## Breakup ends in apparent murder-suicide

Saturday, July 21, 2007

By Barton Deiters and Lindsay Vanhulle

The Grand Rapids Press

WYOMING -- Their relationship was ending, and Byron Center teacher Cristi Curtis had given her live-in boyfriend and colleague Joseph Frees a few days to gather his things and find a new place, police said.

Thursday night, neighbors said they heard Frees' car screech to a halt in front of the home on Jean Street SW. The couple got out, and it was clear they were arguing.

Curtis had talked to a friend that night, describing Frees as extremely drunk, police said.

The last time anyone heard from Curtis, said Wyoming Police Lt. Paul Robinson, was after 10 p.m. Thursday. It was a text message from a friend, asking if everything was OK.

"No" was Curtis' one-word reply.

Around 10:30 p.m., neighbors told police they heard popping sounds, which they attributed to fireworks.

About 12 hours later, Curtis' friends and family grew concerned when the popular teacher and varsity volleyball coach hadn't shown up for a Friday morning volleyball camp.

When no one answered the door at the Jean Street home, Cheryl Curtis crawled through a window and found her daughter's bullet-ridden body in a bedroom, along with Frees' body. Both were 29.

Robinson said all indications were that Frees shot his estranged girlfriend several times before turning the handgun on himself.

On Friday, Cheryl Curtis stood near the crime-scene tape, stunned as police worked inside her daughter's tidy home, just down the street from Kelloggsville High School. She was surrounded by tears and embraces as the couple's co-workers gathered alongside students her daughter had coached.

Nicki Cardosa, Byron Center's junior varsity volleyball coach, was among those waiting for Cristi Curtis to show up at Friday's volleyball camp.

Curtis, who also taught special education, recently was named volleyball coach for Aquinas College, but still worked with the high school girls.

"That's what Cristi was like, she was always there," said Cardosa, 25. "Everyone loved playing for her."

Police said Frees had lived at the house for about six months. He was a physical education teacher at Byron Center's Countryside Elementary and sports medicine therapist at the high school.

His services as high school trainer were contracted through the Center for Physical Rehabilitation. Owner Dan Distin said Frees recently indicated he was looking to do more teaching and drop the high school work.

Curtis was an athletic standout at East Kentwood High School, making several all-conference teams in volleyball and softball. She attended Winthrop University in South Carolina on an athletic scholarship.

"This is somewhat unusual because they were both professional people," Robinson said. "That does not fit the standard profile in cases like this."

Fellow teachers described Curtis as a champion for her students.

Byron Center Superintendent Howard Napp said Curtis was "very effective in working and assisting kids in getting through their academic program."

"I would say Mr. Frees did a very fine job for us, also," he said, declining to elaborate.

Distin said Frees was a good employee who cared about his students.

"He sounded very upbeat and optimistic," he said. "There was no indication of any despair."

"We never saw any aggressive behavior," he said. "We were totally shocked. He always has been very pleasant."

Doug Saltzgaber, a high school phys ed teacher, said he knew both Curtis and Frees well.

"They were just what you'd want your kids to have as teachers and educators," Saltzgaber said. "They sacrificed a lot of their own personal needs to help their kids."

Ronda Varnesdeel, 28, the softball coach at Aquinas, said she knew Curtis for the past six years, helping her get the job at the college.

"She was the nicest person you could ever meet," Varnesdeel said. "Everybody she met, she affected in a positive way."

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### Poor housing plagues migrant workers

Monday, July 23, 2007

By Federico Martinez

[fmartinez@muskegonchronicle.com](mailto:fmartinez@muskegonchronicle.com)

Her body was weary after picking asparagus for 12 hours.

Once in awhile, Griselda Coronado's mind would drift, and she would think about her four small children and the better lives she dreamed for them.

Those thoughts were interrupted by an urgent voice, barely audible over the grinding engine sounds of the asparagus picker. The voice on the other end of the cell phone informed Coronado that the family's trailer -- where she had left the children earlier in the day -- was now engulfed in flames.

Hysterical, Coronado dialed the number of her aunt, Reyna Hernandez, who lived in the Pentwater trailer next to theirs. She pleaded with her aunt to save the children.

"Please, please move away from there," Coronado sobbed. "There's a big propane tank. ..."

Then the phone went dead.

#### Living With Fear

Undetected gas leaks and electrical problems, exposed raw sewage near living areas, structural problems ranging from leaky roofs, rotted flooring and boarded-up windows -- these are some of the problematic living conditions migrant families report every year in Michigan.

"I don't know that we're seeing more (housing complaints)," said Jennifer Mashek, a staff attorney for Michigan's Farmworker Legal Services. "We're more diligent about putting them in writing. We're filing more reports than in the past. But there have always been a lot."

Migrant advocates across Michigan fear more problems with inadequate housing could occur because the number of inspectors is shrinking.

Ten years ago, Michigan's Department of Agriculture employed eight full-time inspectors. Currently, there are four, and one of those inspectors, Art Hulkoff, also handles the department's administrative duties, limiting the amount of time he can go out and inspect.

Those four inspectors are responsible for approximately 900 migrant housing sites, most of which contain multiple dwellings. In the past, migrant housing sites were visited twice per year, said Hulkoff and Mark Swartz, another state housing inspector. These days inspectors only have time for one visit -- which occurs before the migrants arrive.

Landlords are asked to conduct their own property inspections, said Hulkoff. If a problem exists, landlords are required to report back when the issue has been resolved. Landlords often are on the "honor system," because followup inspections can't be done quickly.

Fines for violating housing codes are small and rarely levied, critics contend.

Inspectors and migrant advocates believe many housing problems go unreported each year. Some migrants fear they will lose their jobs and become homeless if they complain about housing conditions. Others stay silent because they are living and working in the U.S. illegally and fear being deported.

## A Dream Goes Up In Flames

For most of their lives, Coronado, 25, and Rogelio Cruz, 32, have worked in the fields. Since the birth of their eldest child, Krystina, 6, the couple have been trying to escape the endless migrant cycle of traveling and picking.

Three years ago the family purchased their first home in Alamo, Texas where Cruz found work at a local retail store. When that job ended last spring, the family was forced to return to its nomadic lifestyle.

In the wee hours of May 22, the family arrived at Robert VanderZanden's Pentwater farm. By 7 a.m. they were harvesting asparagus, with promises a trailer would be ready for them to move into that evening, said Coronado.

"Immediately, we smelled a gas leak," says Coronado, recalling the first moments when they entered 4754 W. Adams. "(The landlord) came over and turned on the furnace. But once it went off it would start again.

"We left the windows open during the night and took turns going outside to get some fresh air."

Their living situation remained unchanged for weeks.

As chance would have it, a group of state officials whose agencies provide services to migrants was touring Oceana County on June 8. Their last stop was the migrant housing site where Coronado and Cruz's family lived.

Officials noted that the children of Coronado and Cruz appeared dazed and lethargic. Eight-month-old Johnny Cruz's lips were a light shade of purple.

A health department official participating in the tour realized there was a gas leak in the trailer and ordered everyone out.

The family moved into a trailer next door while awaiting an inspector to return.

Cruz and Coronado say their landlord informed them on June 14 that the gas leak had been fixed and they could move back in.

After lunch that day the parents returned to the fields. Krystina and Joseph, 5, started to watch a movie. An aunt living next door kept an eye on David, 3 and the baby, Johnny.

Later, another migrant worker who was in the area smelled smoke. The word quickly spread throughout the migrant community.

## A frightening memory

Coronado's voice still trembles when she recalls the day of the fire. A report from the Hart Fire Department said the fire's cause was undetermined.

VanderZanden did not return calls seeking comment.

But Coronado believes the leaky furnace had not been repaired properly and was the cause of her family's terror.

"I received a call at 7:30 p.m.," said Coronado. "The (asparagus) rider I was in makes a lot of noise. (The caller) asked me what trailer do you live in?"

Then he told Coronado, "Your trailer is on fire."

By the time Coronado and Cruz made it back to their home, several fire trucks and ambulances already had arrived. At first there was panic. Nobody knew where the children were.

As it turns out, a visiting uncle from Texas had arrived at the trailer and, upon hearing the aunt's distressed efforts to get the children "as far away as possible," scooped up the children in his car and drove away.

It was well after midnight by the time the entire family was reunited and cramped together inside the aunt's trailer.

"If something would have happened," said Coronado, her voice breaking, "I don't know what I would do."

#### Picking Up The Pieces

A state housing inspector, unaware of the fire, showed up the next day to conduct the inspection.

It was too late to inspect the burned out trailer. But, inspector Mark Stanfield cited VanderZanden for several other housing and property violations.

Windows in other trailers were damaged and needed replacing -- a problem inspector Standfield had already told VanderZanden to correct after an April 17 on-site inspection. Stairs to one trailer were "uneven and wobbly," and "not secured to the ground," the June 30 inspection report stated.

Rusty, discarded appliances littered the property, and a large dumpster was overflowing with trash -- problems also cited by the inspector.

Stanfield indicated that he would return to re-inspect the property, but state officials could not confirm whether that has been done yet.

State inspectors are reviewing how the department handled the incident in Pentwater, Hulkoff told migrant advocates in Lansing recently.

"Should (the inspector) have been there by Monday or Tuesday?" said Hulkoff. "Probably. But, the owner had reassured us the problem had been taken care of." Almost everything the family once owned was gone. Toys. Clothing. Family mementos. All are charred memories.

The family had hoped to make enough money this summer to tide them over until Cruz found another job in Texas.

Instead, they find themselves stranded in Pentwater. Asparagus season ended several weeks ago. The family was without income for weeks.

Another farmer provided them housing several miles away and the couple have found temporary employment working at an area cherry packaging plant.

Emotional scars from that fire remain.

Coronado weeps whenever she begins to talk about it. Cruz tosses and turns at night. Krystina clings to her mother. Even 3-year-old David remembers.

David's parents say he recently shouted across the room: "Mommy, I saw the fire -- you didn't. It was ugly.

Cruz vows the family's faith in God will help them endure. Coronado is even more determined to escape the migrant stream.

"Three years ago I said I would never do this again," Coronado says. "I say again -- I'm never coming back." But, with a growing family and bills to play, there may be no other choice, Cruz admits.

"I have to keep working to provide for my family," said Cruz. "Whether God sends me back here or another state, I have to keep working."

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### Food banks feel the heat Donations fall in summer, but hunger doesn't take a vacation

Saturday, July 21, 2007

By Sharon Emery

Gazette News Service

LANSING -- The thing about July in Michigan is that it's not December. Or even November.

December and November are the months when food banks and local pantries are flooded with donations from charity-minded folks who want to do something for low-income people during the holidays.

The Fourth of July doesn't inspire that kind of giving.

Anne Lipsey, executive director of Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes, said contributions this time of year can dip to as low as 20 percent of what they are during peak season.

"Part of what we're trying to do is remind people that in the summer people are still hungry," she said.

Summer is particularly lean because pantries' core contributors -- schools, businesses and the faith community -- typically have vacations.

"People are not thinking about giving in the middle of summer," said Jane Marshall, executive director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan. Though the supply is down, demand for food assistance is not, she said.

With kids out of school, families who depend on the free or reduced-price federal school lunch program are even more likely to be pressed into using local emergency food programs.

Trying to define the need for food statewide, a new Food Bank Council report found a 37 percent gap between meals provided and meals needed. That worries food bank officials, who call access to food a basic human right.

"All people should be able to purchase the food they need," according to the food bank's "Blueprint to End Hunger" (see [www.fbcmich.org](http://www.fbcmich.org)). "Moving toward a future where everyone enjoys that right is a realistic, affordable and morally compelling goal for Michigan."

But until then, 10 percent of Michigan residents -- about 1 million people -- are using emergency food programs such as community food banks.

Many of them likely also receive food stamps, the federal-government program that supplies an average monthly grant in Michigan of about \$88 per person. About 1.2 million Michigan residents are enrolled in that program. If trends continue through 2007, there will be twice as many Michigan residents on food stamps as in 2001.

The Food Bank Council of Michigan's blueprint -- a county-by-county listing of the need for and participation in food programs -- is designed to give local leaders a better handle on the situation in their area, so they can bridge the gap between meals served and meals needed.

"The exciting and challenging part of this is that every community is going to have to deal with this (the problem of hunger) differently," Marshall said. "Now they have a baseline, something to work from to figure that out."

Among the suggestions for local action:

- Establish local food-security councils to engage citizens and leaders in identifying local needs and customizing solutions.
- Create a county-by-county report card that identifies measurable goals and progress for ending hunger.
- Secure the support of 1,000 organizations to end hunger in Michigan.

County data in the blueprint come from government programs and the food bank network. They do not include numbers from private agencies providing food and meals, including family and faith-based groups.

Blueprint statistics on the number of meals needed in a county are based on population figures for the poorest of residents, those making 100 percent of poverty income or less. That includes individuals making up to \$10,210 annually, or \$20,650 for a family of four.

By comparing that number to the number of meals actually provided, researchers were able to determine the gap between them. Ironically, that gap is sometimes larger in relatively wealthier counties.

“If you live in a place where everyone's poor, it's just part of day-to-day existence to use these program, so everyone knows about them,” Marshall said. “In wealthier counties, where there isn't such a perception of need, the programs are not as much of a priority.”

Gazette staff writer Sarita Chourey contributed to this

report. She can be reached at

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Published July 20, 2007

#### How MiCAFE works

If you are over 60, live in Eaton County and believe you might qualify for Michigan's Coordinated Access to Food, call 1-877-664-2233. An e-mail will be sent a MiCAFE volunteer application assistant, who calls the applicant and sets up a time for a private interview. In the meantime, a list of needed documents is mailed to the applicant so that the interview process goes smoothly. During the interview, the application assistant fills out an on-line form and sends it by e-mail to the Michigan Department of Human Services. Only the applicant knows whether or not they are approved for assistance of as much as \$150 per month. The average assistance is about \$65 per month.

If approved the senior receives a plastic, orange Bridge Card, with a customer service number and a place on the back for the user to sign. It can be used at grocery stores just like a debit or credit card.

#### Want MiCAFE in your county?

MiCAFE is only available in 10 counties, including Eaton, Genesee and Wayne counties. But it is not available in Ingham, Clinton and Ionia counties. The program is administered by Elder Law of Michigan, 318 W. St. Joseph, Suite C200, Lansing, Mich. 48917. If you are interested in launching this inexpensive service for the elderly in your county, call executive director Kate White, or Andrea Meewes, director of MiCAFE at 517-485-9164.

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## Poverty trends up for elderly women

Midday update

Kurt Madden  
Lansing Community Newspapers

Nora DelMorone, 73, worked hard all of her life, but her husband died of cancer, forcing her to sell the family pizzeria business and exhaust her savings to pay off a mountain of medical bills.

She struggled financially. To make ends meet, she had to make a choice — skip meals or skimp on taking her medications.

Thousands of senior women in Michigan share DelMorone's plight — and thousands more will in coming years.

An unexpected medical misfortune often erases decades of savings, leaving a spouse alone with only Social Security income to meet the demands of rising food, gasoline and utility costs.

That leaves seniors, especially women living alone, with some stark choices like those DelMorone faced.

"We have been noticing that a larger number of older adults are not getting enough to eat. Some are malnourished because they may go a day or so without food, and when they do eat, they don't healthy foods, such as fresh vegetables or lean meats," said Kate White, executive director of Delta Township-based Elder Law of Michigan.

According to the 2000 Census, 9,720 seniors in Ingham, Eaton, Clinton and Ionia counties have incomes at or less than the poverty level, or about \$810 per month.

The percentage of seniors living in poverty in Mid-Michigan varies from a low of 12 percent in Clinton County to a high of 20 percent in Ionia County.

Keith Morris, deputy director of Elder Law of Michigan, says as coming generations enter the retirement age, the number of seniors living in poverty will increase.

"Couples will be retiring with higher debt and believing that Social Security will be enough. But what they don't count on is that one spouse will die long before the other," Morris said.

Women who lose their husbands will receive Social Security payments equal to what their husband would have received, but they lose what they were receiving, Morris said.

The trend toward even more poverty among women over 60 is also reflected in a 2006 report from the Institute of Women's Policy Research, which says that 11.1 percent of women 65 or older live in poverty.

That report says only 6 percent of men 65 or older, or 31,901 live in poverty in Michigan.

That group of seniors is vulnerable to rapid rises in costs for drugs, energy and food, and there is a daily struggle to have food on the table. Especially vulnerable are women between 60 and the day the are eligible to receive Medicare benefits.

White said the difference between a day without a meal and a nutritious diet is many times less than \$100 a month.

Seniors, both men and women, often overlook, or believe they are ineligible to receive a key government lifeline — financial assistance for buying food.

Pride, confusion about the application process, lack of transportation, or no way to access a computer to use the Web site are also barriers to receiving up to \$150 for food.

Elder Law of Michigan launched MiCAFE — Michigan's Coordinated Access for Food for Elderly — in 2001 in Genesee County as a way of making it easy for seniors 60 and over to apply for food assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

#### **Program only available locally in Eaton County**

MiCAFE is designed to bring seniors into a welcoming environment and dispel myths about

receiving assistance.

Not just income is evaluated for approval for food assistance; other factors include the amount of money spent on prescription drugs, rent and other basic needs, Morris said.

"MiCAFE is a way to keep people healthy by keeping medical coverage and food affordable for retirees," said Andrea Meewes, MSW, director of that program for Elder Care.

"We hear over and over from older adults that they don't want to be a burden to families...," Meewes said.

DeIMorone, a Genesee County resident, began receiving about \$100 a month for food assistance after receiving help from a MiCAFE volunteer. She doesn't skip meals and even has a little money left over for gas for her car and to get her hair done. She has become a volunteer for the program.

In Mid-Michigan, the large percentage of seniors over 60 don't receive food assistance, officials say. MiCAFE has not been established in Ingham, Clinton and Ionia counties. Expansion of MiCAFE has been hampered by cuts in state and federal funding. Eaton County's program was established using a donation from Eaton Federal Savings Bank.

Elder Law now has four sites in Eaton County where seniors can obtain one-on-one help from trained volunteers to make application for not only food assistance, but also for medical assistance and emergency relief, if necessary.

Eaton County is one of 10 in the state where MiCAFE operates. Immanuel Lutheran Church in Grand Ledge, the Eaton County Senior Center in Charlotte, the Eaton Rapids Medical Center and the Vermontville city offices are all application sites.

Expansion in other Michigan counties can no longer depend on state and federal funds.

"We have been trying to expand, but we have rely on donations to get it started," Morris said.

### **Volunteers drive program**

"It's very easy and convenient," said John Weigel, a volunteer and a member of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Grand Ledge.

The church provides an office and computer and pays for stamps and envelopes. Weigel, and his wife, Carol, act as application assistants.

"I fire up the laptop and ask the senior a series of questions about the income and the expenses they have and fill out a long form. As soon as we are finished, I e-mail the form to the Michigan Department of Human Services, and print out a copy and give it to the senior who is applying and send another copy to the county branch for DHS."

Carol Weigel said, "When I started about the second week in March, I thought I would be coming in two days a month. I am now coming up two to three days a week — the demand has really grown."

All but one of the applicants are women, and most are in their 70s.

"Some of these little, old ladies are really suffering. Their husbands have died and they never worked, or they had a divorce, and they didn't come out of the divorce very well," she said.

"When they come in, they have often been sick, some are mourning — they are really suffering. One lady I interviewed had only \$2 left over after we deducted her monthly expenses," Carol said.

The generation most in need of food assistance — formerly known as Food Stamps, now known as the Bridge Card — have a cultural bias against welfare.

"They grew up in the Depression years and they regard it as welfare. They believe they don't deserve it because they have a home and aren't starving. To them going to the DHS office and

taking a number is not something they — in their heart — can do,” Carol explained.

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